

John Doebel - Final

Hello, my name is Norman Olson. I'm a retired U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service employee and a volunteer at the National Conservation Training Center, which is operated by the Service in Shepherdstown, West Virginia. Today is Thursday the 15th of September 2005 and this interview is being conducted at the Red Lion Hotel on the River in Portland, Oregon. We're here for the Association of Retired Fish and Wildlife Service Employee's reunion. This afternoon I'm going to interview John Doebel, who is also a retired Fish and Wildlife Service employee. And John perhaps we could begin by having you state your full name and spelling it for us; telling us where you were born and raised; where you went to college and the degrees you received; and where and how you started your career with the Fish and Wildlife Service.

JD Okay, my name is John Hunter Doebel. The spelling of the last name is - D O E B E L. I was born in Lima, Ohio on October 10, 1943. I spent most of my school years in Findlay, Ohio, which was roughly only about 35 miles away from Lima. I went to undergraduate school at Ohio Northern University and graduated in 1965. I continued toward a Masters Degree at Virginia Polytechnic Institute, commonly referred to as Virginia Tech now, I guess because of the football team, (laughter) and got my Masters Degree in 1967. During that period I was drafted into the Army and got a deferment and in the interim joined the Navy, I was in the Navy from 1967 to 1971. I initially started with the Fish and Wildlife Service as a student trainee in 1962 at St. Marks Refuge in Florida. The following summer I spent at Reelfoot in Tennessee and the following two summers actually I spent at Mattamuskeet Refuge in North Carolina. When I got out of the Service in '71 I went to work as the Assistant Manager at Loxahatchee Refuge in Florida. Do you want the whole scenario here to Alaska or do you want to move on to Alaska?

NO You could actually sort of cover some of where you were before you got actually to Alaska. That would be good.

JD Okay, I was the manager at a couple of refuges in Arkansas following my time at Loxahatchee, and then I went into the Atlanta Regional Office as a BLHP planner. Then I was ... in '78 I went to Olympia, Washington and I was in an Area Office there and was the Refuge Supervisor for Oregon and Washington. From there I went to the Washington Office and I was Chief of the Branch of Resource Management, that was during the period '84 -'86, and actually I went to another job for a short time in Washington prior to being reassigned to Alaska. My position was eliminated and Bob Gilmore called me up and said, "Hey, I've got a job up in Alaska, do you want to go?" And that was in 1986, I believe, and so I ended up going to Alaska and working for Bob in a job that they then called Associate Regional Directors. There were a smattering of these around various regional offices and basically what they were was like a Special Assistant to the Regional Director and they were considered kind of training assignments for people that were looking to go into higher level jobs.

NO Quick question for you, you mentioned that you worked as a BLHP planner in the Atlanta Regional Office. Exactly what's a BLHP planner?

JD That was the Bicentennial Land Heritage Program. There was a large influx of money that came into ... I can't remember the exact date of it, but it was in celebration of the Bicentennial and the Park Service and the Fish and Wildlife Service came into a fairly large amount of money, probably the largest amount of money they had a one time particularly for capital improvements. And so my job, in coordination with a variety of other people, was to try to sort out what we were going to do and we did a lot of refuge visits and planned basically how we were going to spend the money.

NO Let's go back to that period where you were working in the Branch of Resource Management in the Washington Office, this was the ... some of the years of Director Dunkel?

JD Well, yeah, actually ... actually I think he came in during that period if I'm not mistaken and he was the one that eliminated then my (indecipherable) job.

NO Because Jim Gillett when I ... who I interviewed yesterday afternoon talked about the fact that Director Dunkel had specifically wanted to reduce the size of the Washington Office.

JD Correct, yeah.

NO Okay. So you wound up then in ... in 1986 in Alaska. What sort of work did you do as an Associate Regional Director ... what were you involved with?

JD Well, when I first started ... when I was working for Bob basically I kind of had two functions: one was to work kind of the Realty end of it, there were some problems in Realty and I was supposed to help sort those out, and the other part was the 1002 Program. And at that time I was just sort of fed into both of them gradually, eventually Bob was replaced by Walt Stieglitz, that was probably only about six months into my assignment up there, and when that happened Walt put me basically in charge of coordination of all the 1002 activities out of the Regional Office. And so I spent 95% of my time working in the 1002 area in one way, shape or form. The bulk of my time, at least initially, was spent as a sort of coordinator/facilitator for the Regional Office of this great land exchange that was proposed by then Assistant Secretary Bill Horn. And so ... do you want me to kind of describe what that was in general terms?

NO Actually yeah, Jim Gillett as I say talked a little bit about this ... this land exchange program yesterday and suggested that I might ask you a little bit more about it. So if you could talk, you know, about that program, what was involved, what went on.

JD Yeah, in general terms the notion was that the Alaska Native corporations would offer up some of their property, primarily in holdings or I guess they were all in holdings within existing refuges that they had ... they still held in exchange for rights for drilling in the Arctic in the 1002 area in the event that it was opened. And at that time, you'll remember, there was a push on to open the 1002 area and there were folks that felt like if that were going to happen that we had to try to generate as much benefit for refuges, and particularly for Alaska refuges, as we could. And so I believe this idea was primarily Bill Horn's and he was sort of the ... not only the architect but the executive producer on all this, and originally it started off with some of the corporations that we were most interested in which was CIRI corporation because of the Kenai

and some of the Kodiak properties down there that are still in the process of being acquired as we speak. Eventually Doyon got involved, you know, I'm having trouble remembering, as I recall there were five Native corporations and the way this worked was they offered up pieces of their property through a negotiating process and then a value was placed on that property which was very controversial because it was difficult to appraise a lot of that property and each corporation ended up with a sort of credit, if you will, toward bidding for oil rights on the Arctic. And so eventually what happened was the Arctic was split up into ... by the Mineral Management Service ... into leasing tracts, if you will, that would be in fact used in the event there was an opening and, you know, private corporations would be bidding for those tracts. But what happened was the Native corporations, once a value was assigned to their property, were then given an opportunity in a competitive scenario that actually was held in Washington, DC in a hotel, I don't know whether you remember that, but it was quite controversial because it was kind of a behind the scenes, public not invited sort of thing. And what happened then was each corporation bid on these tracts based on how much credit they had involved in the transaction. And it was kind of a pretty interesting and very complicated sort of scenario sort of from beginning to end and my job basically was to represent the Region in all of this and we went through a series of very very long negotiations with the Native corporations most of which were all held in Washington, usually a week at a time, and they were held about every six weeks I would say for probably a year leading up to this. And the culmination of it was this bidding and what happened was the Washington Post got a hold of it and there was sort of an expose' of all of it at that point and it sort of withered away on its own I think because of the political sort of ramifications of it. Now during this same period we were putting together an environmental impact statement that covered this proposal and that was a fairly rapid sort of exercise. I think we finished that in less than a year and the primary authors on that were Jon Andrew and Ann Rappaport and basically those two people and ... I didn't do any writing, I was kind of the orchestrator ... put together a fairly large EIS that described this ... this proposed action. And I think that EIS was actually signed off on as a matter of record, but it ... none of this ever came to fruition. And so I say I was ... I was in Alaska approximately 2 ½ years and probably almost a year and a half of my time was spent primarily working on this single aspect of the 1002 Program.

NO How was that ... once this was made common knowledge, how did the conservation community react to it?

JD Well, they were ... they were outraged of course. (laughter)

NO I would assume.

JD I think the, if I recall, I believe the conservation organizations in Alaska were aware we were doing it. I'm not sure they knew about the particulars but they knew that it was going on and they were not happy about it from the beginning of course and then once it was ... once it was exposed in the papers and the fall out, not a lot I think from conservation organizations, but from other people it was sort of like over. And I can't recall how it ended except that it was just kind of like it faded away and you never heard anymore about it and I'm sure the political pressure was such that there ... there wasn't the will to continue. And like I say, it was primarily a Bill Horn initiative so if there was any pressure probably above him, at the Secretary's level,

you know, there was ... probably the representative demise of the proposal, although in effect, I mean all the work had been done, it was still sitting there. If it looked like Congress was going to take any action, I think that was about the same time that it wilted away in Congress too ... the proposal ... it could have surfaced again in the context of negotiations in Congress. I think that was originally the idea anyway, was to get the thing far enough along so that if the Congress did act they could look at that and see if that was something they wanted to pursue and from that point of view I guess it had some value. The biggest problem with the whole thing, other than sort of the whole speculative nature of it, was trying to assign value to the Native in holdings. And all the Natives brought in holdings into it that strategically weren't all that important, although some of them are still being acquired as we speak or are involved in land exchanges, probably some of the Doyon property that's been involved in an exchange at Yukon Flats.

NO Yukon Flats, that's right.

JD Yeah, I suspect that much of that was in this proposal and of course a fair amount of properties been bought on Kodiak that we were interested in. And I think some probably of the CIRI properties also been acquired and the Conservation Fund and some other people have worked on that. So it was a pretty interesting and unique experience from my point of view, something I'd never really seen before (laughter) and it was done at a fairly high level. You know, Bill Horn was not involved directly in the negotiations, but he was kind of involved in it day to day in terms of what was going on. And I do recall ... this is rather comical in a way ... when we were heading towards the ... the ... I guess the five yard line and getting the EIS done, Bill Horn was so concerned about us making sure that it was done on time that they actually made us come in to the Washington Office to finish writing the program. And so Jon Andrew, Ann Rappaport and myself were brought into the Washington Office and we actually set up shop in the Director's conference room. And he would come by ... he didn't know really very much about it quite frankly ... but he would just come by once and a while to see how we were doing and whether we were going to get it done. And we did fortunately, through the efforts of Jon and Ann. I had kind of an opportunity to pick two people that I thought could do the job and I sure got the right ones.

NO You got good people.

JD Yeah, so that was that was pretty interesting. And then when I was there, that was when there were a whole variety of personnel actions taking place as a result of Director Dunkel's sort of edicts, if you will, and that must have about in ... July ... June or July of 1988 and he called me into his office ... I was kind of saying oh no, what now ... to ask me if I wanted to go to Portland to be acting ARD for Refuges, because that was the period in which three of the Directorate members were being basically asked to retire or reassigned, whatever you want to call it, but were being removed. And so I left ... but of course that thing was pretty much over with at that point so the timing was pretty good for me ... I left and became acting and then I was eventually reassigned there, that was like in ... oh, I don't know, I was there for three or four months and then I got reassigned there like in February or March of the ... of 1989. One other kind of sidelight to this, although it really doesn't have any direct bearing on the exchange proposal was the ... and I don't want to go into too much detail here ... was the period where the transition between Bob Gilmore and Walt Stieglitz. And I don't know if anybody's touched on

that, but that was probably ... you know in particular because of the position I was in because I had been hired by Bob Gilmore and was kind of acting as his Special Assistant ... where Bob got a call from the Director one day while we were all sitting in the conference room and about five minutes later he came back and said he had been removed from his job and that Jim Gritman was coming up. And you may recall he moved Bob down a floor and down at the end of the hall. Jim Gritman came up and then eventually Walt came up. Of course I had worked with Walt for ... I knew him since I was a student trainee so ... and I had worked for Jim Gillett who had worked for Walt in the Washington Office ... so I knew Walt real well, and it all worked out just fine. But it was a little bit of an anxious time for everybody. (laughter)

NO Oh yes, I remember those days very well, yes. But ... speaking of some of the people that were there, what was the hierarchy then ... we're talking about in the Regional Office for example ... you mentioned the Regional Directors, who were the ARDs for Refuges and Wildlife?

JD Well, let's see, the ARD for Refuges was John Rogers; Joe Mazzoni was his Deputy; for Fisheries was Jon Nelson; for Ecological Services Roland Gould ... who's now the Regional Director up there ... and then Ed White was the ARD for Administration. And I think those people were pretty much there for all of my time which was only 2 ½ years. And then of course there was Bob Gilmore, Jim Gritman and Walt Stieglitz. And so ... and I worked a lot with Glen Elison and the Research people during that period too. We used Research quite a lot, that was when Palmisano was Chief of Research down there and of course Glen was up at Arctic at that point. So that was sort of the ... and I was sort like almost really a fifth wheel in the Regional Directorate being a Special Assistant, but it worked out fine you know. But I don't think they ... I don't believe they refilled ... those jobs were optional at that time for Regional Director and I don't believe they refilled it after I left, although I can't remember for sure, I'm not certain on that.

NO And then the hierarchy in Washington at this time?

JD Well, it was Dunkel of course, at least toward, you know, toward the latter half. The Deputy was Steve Robinson and the ARD for Refuges was ... or not the ... the Assistant Director was Walt Stieglitz when I was there and then when he left ... I'm trying to think who replaced him ... I guess Bob Streeter ... does that sound right?

NO That sounds like it might be right, yeah.

JD I think so, yeah, I think it was Bob Streeter. I know when I was in Portland as ARD he was the Assistant Director, so that was kind of the people that I was dealing with and then of course, people in the Assistant Secretary's Office. And I worked very closely with the Solicitors' Office ... Sharon Allender, you probably remember her ... and Sharon and I were kind of part of a team. Sharon and I and the fellow from MMS, his name was Eric Karlela and he was like a division chief and the three of us plus a fellow from BLM by the name of Ted Stevens. We were sort of the Interior team that dealt with the Native corporations in the negotiations. And so I got to know those people pretty well too, obviously. So I probably spent

like a week out of every six, or maybe a little more frequently than that, in Washington during that period.

NO And Jim Gillett was the Chief of Refuges?

JD Jim Gillett was the Chief of Refuges, yeah.

NO Okay, now did you ... while you were in Alaska ... did you get a chance to spend a lot of time out in the field?

JD Well, I got out a fair amount. I was able to deal particularly with those refuges where there were proposals for exchanges so, you know, I was ... I got to most of the refuges, not all of them, but Yukon Flats, Kodiak, you know, obviously Kenai, Yukon Delta. I went to a couple of others in the interior, I'm trying to think which ones they were actually right now ... anyway I got around a fair amount. I mean I got to go out on the 1002 area during the height of the winter one time that was really an interesting experience. Actually the Arctic ... Dunkel sent out Robert Smith with Don Barry who was at that point, I guess he was the Deputy Assistant Secretary, and I remember we did a tour up there and the wind was blowing about 80 miles an hour and it was about 40 degrees below zero, (laughter) I'll never forget that. And then I did another tour up there with Susan Reece one time and she was the Assistant ... she was another Deputy Assistant Secretary. I've kind of lost track of ... I think Don left and then she came in ... I've kind of lost track of that, but they were both up there at one time and I know I took trips up there with them.

NO Did you make it to Kaktovik then?

JD Yeah, I made it to Kaktovik. (laughter)

NO But always in the winter right? Did you ever get up there in the summer?

JD You know, I don't think I was there during the summer. I can't recall that I was. Part of the reason we went up there obviously was to see what the oil and gas operations looked like on the ground and of course, they preferred you go up there in the wintertime (laughter) because it didn't look quite so bad, you know, but I don't recall being up there during the summer.

NO Yeah, I made it to Kaktovik but it was wintertime again we went up for meetings and I was on south side of the Brooks, you know, during the summertime but I never got out into the coastal plain, so ... all I ever saw was this huge white expanse ... so interesting. You mentioned too I think that some of that land at Kodiak has actually been acquired and in fact I think they are still working on that, doing some of that land acquisition done.

JD Right. Yeah, that's my understanding.

NO So that would be probably some of the tracts then that were involved initially?

JD Yeah, exactly, yeah.

NO Okay.

JD Yeah, there were ... what's the Native corporation down there ... you know, they had all those tracks along the Karlik and those were of prime interest and some of those I'm pretty sure have been purchased. And then the ... the villages there had some property, the ... and that stuff was along ... I can't remember that village's name right now ... oh, Akhiok ... Akhiok Kaguak and then some ... let's see, a village corporation I can't remember, but Ralph ... what was his name Ralph ... he's still involved in that ... oh, my mind draws a blank ... I want to say like Aletro or something like that ... or Larson, no ... well anyway, those same people and some of those same tracts are involved in the acquisition efforts now. I'm not sure how they're going about appraising those properties there, that's still I'm sure a difficult process, because once you establish a precedent and then I don't know how they went about doing that and of course didn't have ... they weren't government purchases at least to begin with, you know, they were purchased by the Conservation Fund, a lot of them I think were probably even donated. And so the standard appraisal practices probably didn't apply, it was a negotiated price probably, but once you establish that precedent that then can form ... if it's an arm's length transaction ... can form the basis for further appraisals, so it does provide a benefit there regardless of all this sticky business, particularly those tracts along the interior that it's, you know, it's very difficult to do anything with them from an economic point of view, you know, they're just not worth much.

NO Are you keeping track of a lot of what's going on through the group Blue Goose Alliance and are you involved with them?

JD Well, I'm involved with the Blue Goose Alliance. I don't track it too close now, I mean primarily I'm still friends with Glen Elison and I hear what's going on and I contribute to the Conservation Fund so I get their literature. And I hear from Glen from time to time about what's going on so, but other than that directly I'm, you know, not involved and I don't actively pursue it, you know.

NO Oh, other than Glen is there anyone else from the Alaska days that you keep in touch with?

JD Oh, Joe Mazzini and I are still good friends. In fact he was up fishing oh, about three weeks ago. He comes up every summer and fishes with me for salmon out in the ocean and we periodically get together with some people for a float trip and in fact we're about due for that. Normally that is made up of Glen Elison, Dick Pospahala, and I still hear from him and of course he's moved to Washington State, you know, down by Spokane now, he's building a house. Bill Seitz who was the Research Director up there and is now retired in Bend ... I wonder if he's going to be here, by the way, he might, he's not that far away. Bill Seitz, Paul Schmidt, who we're still friends with and in fact they were at our house last summer. And I guess Paul was ... he was a Refuge Supervisor in those days. He used to be ... he worked for me in Washington and actually Joe Mazzoni worked for me when he was in Malheur and I was the Refuge Supervisor, so I've known him for years ... Joe lives down in California. Let's see, I believe there's somebody else, and of course Dave Olsen. So the last ... let's see the last trip we took was the summer before Dave died which was two years ago, yes, yeah. I'm trying to think ... I

think I've picked off everybody you all know ... it was kind of a group of six or eight of us that used to float and we still periodically do.

NO You mentioned also that there were some things involving Realty that you were initially involved with in Alaska.

JD Well basically, it was a dispute (laughter) between Bob Gilmore and the Chief of Realty, they couldn't get along, and so Bob ...

NO Was that Sharon?

JD No, that was Bill ...

NO Oh, Bill Mattice.

JD Bill Mattice, he was kind of a character in and of himself, and he drove Bob Gilmore nuts. So Bob actually tried to make me Chief of Realty ... they didn't have a ... they didn't have a PD for me when I first got there, so somehow or another he used a Realty Chief PD for a little while and he kind of gave me the job of trying to clean up the Realty Program. Well, you know, that was almost impossible and then I basically hired Sharon Janis when Bill stepped down. And that was a ... not a very fun time for me being up here because I didn't know the program very well, I didn't know the people very well, and Bob just kind of threw me into the fray and it eventually ... eventually sorted itself out and I think worked out okay, but ... I guess ... my recollection is Bill retired here I guess.

NO I believe so, yes.

JD Yeah, but anyway that was about a ... it seemed like that lasted maybe as long as six months that was about it. Once Walt got up there it kind of went away. Well ... and Sharon Janis was hired about that same time too.

NO Okay, was Gail Baker in Realty at that time?

JD She was ... what was she doing ... was she a Realty planner at one time?

NO She was in Realty for a long time and then she ... she wound up being my boss ... my last boss in Alaska. She was put over sort of the Resource Support group I think.

JD I think that's what she was doing when I was there, yeah, yeah.

NO Okay, so she may have already moved out of there.

JD Yeah, she had already moved out of that. So, yeah ... Jon Andrew was down there as the planner as I recall, yeah, so that's what Gail was doing when I was there ... whatever they called that section.

NO It was originally Resource Support and I'm not sure what it was called when she was there, but after Clay Hardy left ... Clay was my supervisor and then when he retired I wound up working for Gail.

JD Oh, wasn't he Chief of Planning?

NO He was ... he ... let's see '88 probably in '87 I'm thinking, they eliminated that position ... he was a Special Assistant to the Regional Director for ANILCA affairs and he was involved with the Alaska Lands Council and there was something there where they ... he kind of got removed from that job and I think they eliminated his position and they wound up making him the Chief of Planning.

JD Oh, okay.

NO And he was the Chief of Planning until he retired. I believe that was either December of '88 or January of '89 ... when he actually left Alaska.

JD Okay, that was about the same time I left, yeah.

NO Okay, well there was a lot actually happening. Have you been back to Alaska since you ... since you left?

JD Yeah, I've been back there probably oh, well, let's see, I left ... I used to go back every summer and do a float trip, I've probably been back there ten times on float trips primarily ... fishing trips.

NO Okay, and you retired when?

JD I retired in 1998.

NO That was after you did the ... almost ten years I guess ... you were the ARD here in the Portland office?

JD Yeah, correct and then we retired only about a hundred miles away from here on some property that we already owned, so that worked out pretty nicely.

NO I'm going to be interviewing a couple more people tomorrow ... John Kurtz in the morning, he was the Refuge Supervisor North.

JD Okay, right.

NO And Scott McLean who was actually a biologist at Yukon Flats.

JD Yeah, right.

NO And then Steve Moore ... I'll be sitting down talking to Steve Moore tomorrow afternoon or tomorrow evening.

JD Well, he was never up there was he?

NO No, he wasn't up there but I'm really talking to him because he did a detail ... a two month detail in 1983 when we were doing the Kenai draft plan and we had gone back to DC and had met with Jim Gillett and Bill Horn and others and we were trying to figure out ... we needed to rewrite the first draft.

JD I see.

NO And I think Steve was working in DC at that time and Stephanie Caswell I think volunteered to let him come up and he came up for two weeks ... or for two months and actually helped us rewrite the ... rewrite the Kenai draft. So I'm just going to talk him about that so it will be a very short one and in fact I just talked to him this morning and confirmed all of that so ... and of course he's still working here in the Portland Regional Office.

JD Right.

NO He worked under you then when you were?

JD Yeah, in fact I hired him. He was ... he was actually working in Sacramento I think at the time.

NO Right, it was the San Joaquin Valley Project or something like that.

JD Yeah, I can't remember ... it was some sort of special deal and when Blaine Graves retired then I hired him as ... whatever we called that job, it was sort of like Chief of Operations or something like that. Yeah, and he's been in that job then for probably 10 years or better I suspect now, yeah.

NO Yeah, his job I think has expanded now he's ... I just looked at his title ...

JD Yeah, it's pretty long. (laughter)

NO Yeah, he's in charge of a lot of people apparently ... including the old Refuge Operations thing and some new stuff. It's the Division of Natural Resources and Refuge Operations I think, but I will be talking to him tomorrow afternoon. What stands out in your mind in terms of that period when you were in Alaska in terms of what was the most interesting thing ... the most exciting thing you really were involved with?

JD Well, all of it, but I mean the land exchange was probably the most unique sort of aspect of my whole job and it's something that probably, you know, was so ... was so out of the ordinary that it will probably never happen again, you know. So I would say that was probably ... and it was in many ways it was pretty interesting and educational at the same time, but also

kind of frustrating because I think we kind of felt like, many of us at least, this is never going to happen. You know, we kind of hoped it wasn't going to happen, at the same time we had to kind of put in our time and due diligence trying to make it happen, you know. So in a way it was interesting, but in a ... it was also frustrated by the fact that we never really saw any of the results of it ... at least immediately. But it was ... it was good and I had a lot of good interaction with the Regional Director, you know, on a day-to-day basis, and it was a good training kind of exercise too, for me. So I think it helped me career wise for sure. You know, when I was aspiring toward my next job and I had already targeted kind of that job when I left Portland back several years before ... four or five years before ... I was sort

NO You were interested in going back?

JD Yeah, I was interested, in fact if the person that was in it was going to retire I was hoping to compete for that job when it came open and I'm sure that my time in Alaska ... and not only that I was pretty, you know, I'd got a lot of experience because of Washington in operating at fairly high levels in Washington too, and, you know, that always helps too. I think I got more Washington experience when I was working in Alaska than when I was working in Washington.

NO Oh, because you were putting so much time in back there.

JD Yeah, I mean I didn't have quite the bureaucratic kind of reigns on me when I was back there as you have when your staff, you know, in Refuges you kind of have to be a little bit careful about how you interact with people above your boss.

NO Now, when you went to Portland as the ARD there were a couple of Alaskans that came down to work for you I think, as Supervisors ... Mike Nunn and

JD Yeah, Mike came down ... Ron Perry came down as my Deputy.

NO Oh really.

JD Yeah, he was my Deputy for I think for two years before he retired.

NO Okay, so he didn't retire in Alaska?

JD No, he retired out of Portland.

NO Okay, okay, and I'm thinking the ... the Deputy at Arctic ...

JD Oh yeah ... oh wow, I've drawn a blank on that ... he's down in Louisiana now in the midst of all of that business down there ... oh, it drives me crazy ... I'm just drawing a blank ... but of course I know who you mean because he was a Refuge Supervisor too.

NO Right, right so ... so there were some Alaskans that came down and worked in the program down here in Portland.

JD Oh yeah, yeah and I think it's ... it makes a fairly easy transition coming out of Alaska to come to the Pacific Northwest, its not that far and there is a lot of sort of interaction, if you will, between the north ... the Pacific Northwest and Alaska, you know, from a fishing point of view and, you know, tourists and cruises and although operationally from a Fish and Wildlife Service point of view there's very little, but there is a kinship there, you know, just from living in the Pacific Northwest.

NO Oh, I'm trying to remember that name.

JD Oh man, it's driving me crazy.

NO Phil and I were talking about him yesterday of course, because when he ... when he left Arctic Phil sort of filled in behind him.

JD Right, right ... I can picture him just as clear as day, you know ... it just sort of escapes me all of the sudden. I was thinking about him in the last couple of days because of all that Hurricane Katrina response and I'm sure he's in the thick of that. I don't know whether you saw that recent email that came out of the southeast that described what the refuge people were doing down there, you know, its pretty interesting. You can imagine everything from search and rescue to trying to keep the refuge together and so in fact they set up I think sort of the emergency response team down there, you know ... well, fire primarily is what its used for (indecipherable) too and so I'm sure ... because he's the manager at ... I think they refer to it as Southwest Alaska ... Southwest Louisiana Complex now. I'll think of it as soon as we

NO Don?

JD Don Voros.

NO Don Voros, that's right.

JD I knew if we came up with the first name I would be able to put it together. Yeah, he was in ... he was the Supervisor probably for ... he must have been there almost ten years.

NO Yeah, he was there quite a while.

JD Yeah, so yeah, he ... and Bob Fields was a Supervisor part of the time I was still there and Sandy Wilbur; Mike Nunn was an Assistant; Rick Colman then; and let's see, Rob Schellenberger was my Deputy when I first went down there.

NO Oh really.

JD Yeah.

NO Before he went to DC?

JD Yeah, so I had quite a cast of characters come through there in the course of (laughter) ... and Carolyn Bowhan was my Deputy at one time.

NO Really. Oh my goodness.

JD So I couldn't keep a Deputy ... I ran them off pretty regularly. (laughter)

NO A lot of, you know, a lot of the people you've worked with or who have worked for you actually, have gone on to higher positions. I'm specifically thinking of Jon, you know, who's now the ARD for Refuges and Wildlife in Atlanta. Jon's done quite well, he's a very capable person.

JD Oh yeah, I enjoyed working with him. He's got a great sense of humor to ... he's very bright, a funny guy.

NO It seems to me when I first went to Alaska he was one of those individuals that in order to get into the Fish and Wildlife Service, and of course he was qualified, you know, in terms of degrees in biology and everything, but had to take a clerk typist job to get in.

JD Yeah, I think so, yeah, I think that's right.

NO I can remember him working in the typing pool I think.

JD And he was pretty laid back in a way, but at the same time we were frustrated so ... in fact I encouraged him to go into Washington out of there because he was a real talent, you know, you could see that. And he was sort of languishing to a certain degree up there I think and so he kind of bloomed I think when he went back to Washington, you know.

NO Oh yeah, well he was involved with the project in Texas ... the new refuge ... the endangered species refuge ... the Balcones ...

JD Yeah, you may be right, but I was thinking that was already ...

NO He was because when we were working on Refuges 2003 and we did a ... we did one of our meetings I think in Austin or someplace and he came to the meeting and he was working on some presentations for that project at that time and I think that was just before he wound up going off to Florida to the Keys. And then there was an exchange of managers and he wound up in Florida and worked on that sanctuary ... that preserve before he went up to ... up to Atlanta and then eventually to Washington and then back to Atlanta.

JD Right, so he did a lot of moving around.

NO Oh yeah, he's done a lot of moving around, yeah, but as you say a very very capable person and a nice person to work with. What ever happened ... Mike Nunn went to a refuge didn't he?

JD Mike Nunn ended up going to Sheldon Hart Mountain and then he retired about a year or a year and a half ago, within the last two years, he's recently retired too. And I believe he still lives down in that area although I haven't seen much of him ... I hear about him through Bob Fields primarily, he's still in touch with him, yeah. So he must have gone down there ten years or so almost before he retired I would say.

NO Okay, and the Blue Goose Alliance?

JD Well, that's a group that was formed back about 4 years ago I believe ... 2001 ... 2000 ... 2001 and it is made up primarily of retired refuge people. And its folks who feel pretty strongly that refuges should be separated out from the Fish and Wildlife Service and be an agency onto itself within the Department of the Interior, so that refuges would be on an equal footing with the Bureau of Land Management, the Forest Service and the Park Service in terms of land management agency status, if you will, that have their own budgets and their own directors, their own policies, that sort of thing. And so I've been on the board of that for I guess ever since day one it seems like ... three or four years I guess almost four years now ... and that group meets annually. Bill Reffalt is the president now and there ... there's kind of a core of about 10 or 12 people that sort of do most of the leg work it seems like and there a group of what we call affiliates that probably number around 50 or something like that ... primarily retired refuge people. There are a few people out of the friends groups that belong, but there has been some ... I guess intimidation is the word to use ... on the part of the Fish and Wildlife Service to discourage either current employees or even friends from being actively involved.

NO Being involved.

JD Yeah. And so we do have a lot of sympathetic I think employees, refuge managers that are not necessarily a part of it, but we are picking up a fair number of people that are recently retired too, particularly out of Region 4. And of course Clay is a member, I don't know if he's a board member or not I can't recall ... I think he is and last year we met in ...

NO New Hampshire?

JD No, last year we met at ... just ... in New Orleans during Mardi Gras.

NO Were you in New Hampshire recently?

JD No, I wasn't in the New Hampshire meeting.

NO There was a meeting in New Hampshire?

JD I think there was, yeah.

NO Because I ... I interviewed ... the other person I interviewed in Maine was Charlie Blair who's the ... now the Refuge Manager at Petit Manan in Maine and he mentioned that he had seen Joe Mazzoni.

JD Oh, that was probably the Refuge Association ... the National Wildlife Refuge Association.

NO Maybe it was the Refuge Association. He had seen him at a meeting in New Hampshire just recently.

JD Yeah, that was the Refuge Association.

NO Oh, okay, okay.

JD So we met down in New Orleans last year and I think we're meeting in Austin this coming March if I recall. And Phil Morgan's actively involved and, you know, the Redfearn's are very actively involved some people like that and of course Don Redfearn has got quite a bit of an Alaska background too. Have you talked to him?

NO Oh, yeah, he's one of the people that I contacted.

JD His comments would come in handy too.

NO No, he was down in Phoenix at the time but he said, in an email I got back from him, he said they were actually interested in moving back up ... probably into this area because they were tired of the heat.

JD Yeah, they talked about moving here but I not ... I haven't heard whether they were coming ... coming back up this way.

NO Yeah, well, I think the comment really was we may be in the area because we might be looking at that area to go to, so there was a possibility that they may show up at the Retiree's Reunion in Portland.

JD Okay, yeah, I knew they coming in the midst of the search, if you will.

NO Is there, you know, I've heard about this, you know, for a number of years that this movement ... this interest in doing this and I know its been alive for awhile, is there any interest in Congress, or any support in Congress, for doing something like this?

JD Very little from what we can tell. I mean there's not much motivation at the present time to pursue it. Most ... I'd say most of the staff you talk to back there see it as more government and more cost when you start talking about it. And to a degree ... to a degree they're probably right. I guess the question is does the benefit outweigh the cost. And I think most of us feel like eventually it will happen, but it could be a long time. And it may even require just a certain set of circumstances and it could be something like opening up the Arctic to oil and gas drilling, where they're looking to throw some benefits to the refuge system as the result of some other action. And, you know, a lot of Alaska legislation kind of fell into that category, it was sort of opportunistic. And so I think for most of us at this point it's a matter of kind of keeping the notion alive, you know, and continue to sponsor that whole idea in the event there ever is an

opportunity and, you know, we may not see it in our life time, but I think most of us think it probably will happen.

NO It will happen eventually. Well, it makes a certain amount of sense.

JD Yeah it does.

NO I mean if you look at it as land based, you know, a land management agency.

JD Yeah, right. And the Service ... we've tried to portray in such a way that it's not a negative in terms of the Service, because the Service is such a broad based organization and there's certainly interests competing for the dollars that are available and just the attention and the, you know, direction in the leadership that we feel like it needs that it's difficult for anybody, I don't care who the Director is, to provide that level of leadership support to the kind of all these siblings, if you will. Particularly to the Endangered Species Program as large and sort of politically sensitive as it is, you know, and I think to a certain degree represents a distraction to refuges. Of course the Fish and Wildlife Service wants to hold on to refuges because it represents sort of the good side, you know, the right half part of the agency as opposed to ...

NO Absolutely.

JD As opposed to ... to the general public at least, you know, and so it's kind of interesting, but I don't see there's anything that's going to happen short of something very unusual happening. Like I mean, if they opened up the Arctic to oil and gas they are going to probably put some ... some mitigation features into that, that was always the idea to begin with. And so they could pick up on that notion as part of that, but even that I think is probably a long shot. I'm sort of philosophical about it all.

NO Something else that I viewed from afar I guess over the years, but the question of, you know, this was taking place I'm sure while you were still here, this Sacramento Branch sort of the Region. I ... in talking to people like Chuck Houghton in Planning telling me how they had a big slice of their budget has now been shifted down to Sacramento and they've lost some people. I guess they had a very limited buy out program to reduce size of staff and all, that's been going for a number of years ... that looks like they're trying to create sort of an 8th Region.

JD Yeah, they basically have done that, I mean they have ...

NO For all practical purposes.

JD For all practical purposes. I'm not sure they call it a Regional Office, but for all practical purposes that's what's happened. I don't know, it's a little bit hard for me to comment on that because most of that all happened after I left. You know, I left in '98 and the early stages ... in fact that hadn't really happened when I left, but it was being proposed and it had been agreed to and that's when Mike Spear left and went down there. I don't know, California's got a lot going on and there's probably, at least conceptually, a fair amount of merit to ... to that happening. And this Region, you know, has enough going on that would certainly qualify so you know, that

was probably as much a political thing as anything else I think at the time that it happened, but in the long run it was probably inevitable I think anyway so. And I never, you know, California as far as I was concerned could go away. (laughter) I mean there was a lot involved down there and I was pretty heavily involved in the political issues when I was here and I enjoyed that, but California's a tough place to do business.

NO I'll bet.

JD Yeah, and its going to get a lot worse before it gets better, there's just so many people, you know.

NO Yeah, there's just so much going on.

JD Yeah.

NO Yeah. How was it dealing with the Pacific Islands?

JD Very enjoyable actually, at times with the Pacific Islands that was kind of the highlight of my time as an ARD because I got to travel pretty extensively over in the Pacific, you know, all the way to Guam and Tinian and Rose Atoll and to quite a few of those no named islands and spent a lot of time in the Hawaiian Islands. And it got to be a little bit, you know, routine after you've taken a lot of trips because we would ... we had a pretty big program over there and I mean I enjoyed it and I think, you know, we made a lot of progress during that time. But it always sort of a struggle because our program was so large and people that hadn't ... weren't real familiar with it had trouble sort of recognizing the complexity of it and the cost of just doing business over there you know ... you know, out on Midway and some of those places and of course now they're struggling with that, but it was a lot of fun and I enjoyed it.

NO Well, it's interesting I was remembering back to 2003 we held meetings during that period in ... at Kilauea Point, which was an absolutely delightful place.

JD Oh yes.

NO That was beautiful ... that was incredible going there and then of course in Honolulu too. It was an interesting sort of an experience.

JD And I guess they're making that a 15 if they haven't already.

NO That's what I heard.

JD Yeah, in fact I heard they've already got someone selected. I don't know whether that's happened or not so ... and of course Jerry Lineke has been out there since forever and of course he came out of Alaska. There were also a lot of Alaska people who went to the Hawaiian Islands ... kind of odd in a way, but it seemed like Hawaii attracted people from Alaska for whatever reason.

NO Well, a lot of Alaskans spent time in Hawaii so.

JD Yeah, that's right.

NO So it probably worked out well ... oh, Jerry Lineke, yeah, that's certainly ... he was from the Delta I guess, you know, at one time.

JD Well, he was in the Regional Office and I think ... I forget when he ... yeah, he was involved with I think logistics, a lot of logistics and supplying people.

NO When anything ... anytime you needed something you went to see Jerry, you know, you wanted a refrigerator for the Regional Office; he'd get you a refrigerator.

JD Yeah. That's what I always heard.

NO He was really good at that so.

JD Yeah, and of course he's been in Hawaii, oh, gee, I suppose 15 years now at least and he should be ... he must be 60 now I suppose, I'm almost 63. I think he and I are about the same age, so I don't know what will happen, I guess he'll stay there till he dies, I don't know.
(laughter)

NO For sure. Well, is there anything else you can think of that you want cover or you want to mention? I think we've covered the land exchange issue pretty well, that was very informative.

JD No, I think I've pretty well covered the ground, at least as far as I can recall, which is somewhat limited. (laughter)

NO Okay, excellent. I guess with that then we've covered about 51 minutes now, so I guess with that, we could perhaps go freshen up and I want to thank you for sitting down with me this afternoon.

JD Great, I enjoyed it. Thanks.

NEOlson 18 November 2009